

IN THE CLAIMS

Claims 1 and 2 (Cancelled)

(1) 2

3. (Currently amended) A furnace for drawing an optical fiber comprising a muffle tube and an inner tube connected to an end of the muffle tube, arranging inside said muffle tube and said inner tube a preform supported by a dummy rod at an upper part thereof, in such a manner that said preform descends with said dummy rod and said preform is melted by a heater arranged outside of said muffle tube, so as to draw an optical fiber from the lower end of said preform, wherein one or more partitions, each partition comprising one or two separating plates, separate a space inside said inner tube above said preform into plural parts in an advancing direction of said preform arranged inside said space, and descending with said preform during drawing an optical fiber, and a gas blowing inlet for blowing an inert gas into said inner tube and said muffle tube is provided at the wall of said inner tube at a part under said separating plate A furnace for drawing an optical fiber as claimed in claim 2, wherein said one or more partitions are two or more partitions and the separating plates being penetrated by said dummy rod descend with said dummy rod, and the respective two or more partitions of separating plates are stopped one by one on said inner wall of said inner tube from an upper part, the outer diameters of said respective separating plates of the two or more partitions decrease gradually one by one from the upper part to the lower part, said inner tube has a truncated cone shape by decreasing the inner diameter thereof from the upper part to the lower part, said plural partitions of separating plates descend with said dummy rod, and said plural partitions of separating plates are stopped in their descent one partition by one partition from the upper part owing to the contact of the outer periphery of said separating plate with the inner wall of said inner tube.

Claims 4 and 5 (Cancelled)

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6. (Currently amended) A furnace for drawing an optical fiber comprising a muffle tube and an inner tube connected to an end of the muffle tube, arranging inside said muffle tube and said inner tube a preform supported by a dummy rod at an upper part thereof, in such a manner that said preform descends with said dummy rod and said preform is melted by a heater arranged outside of said muffle tube, so as to draw an optical fiber from the lower end of said preform, wherein one or more partitions, each partition comprising one or two separating plates, separate a space inside said inner tube above said preform into plural parts in an advancing direction of said preform arranged inside said space, and descending with said preform during drawing an optical fiber, and a gas blowing inlet for blowing an inert gas into said inner tube and said muffle tube is provided at the wall of said inner tube at a part under said separating plate, A furnace for drawing an optical fiber as claimed in claim 5 characterized in that said one partition or plural partitions, each partition comprising one or two separating plates, arranged in the vicinity of the lower end of said dummy rod or the upper part of said preform to descend with said preform, wherein at least one of said one partition or plural partitions is composed of an outer member and an inner member, the outer diameter of said outer member is smaller than the inner diameter of said inner tube, the center hole diameter of said outer member is larger than the outer diameter of said dummy rod so as to absorb the deviation from a concentric condition of said inner tube and said dummy rod, the outer diameter of said inner member is larger than said center hole diameter of said outer member and smaller than said outer diameter of said outer member, the center hole diameter of said inner member is the same as or larger than said outer

diameter of said dummy rod, and said dummy rod penetrates through said center hole while said inner member is fixed to said dummy rod or is placed on a supporting member fixed to said dummy rod, and said outer member is placed on said inner member.

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7. (Currently amended) A furnace for drawing an optical fiber comprising a muffle tube and an inner tube connected to an end of the muffle tube, arranging inside said muffle tube and said inner tube a preform supported by a dummy rod at an upper part thereof, in such a manner that said preform descends with said dummy rod and said preform is melted by a heater arranged outside of said muffle tube, so as to draw an optical fiber from the lower end of said preform, wherein one or more partitions, each partition comprising one or two separating plates, separate a space inside said inner tube above said preform into plural parts in an advancing direction of said preform arranged inside said space, and descending with said preform during drawing an optical fiber, and a gas blowing inlet for blowing an inert gas into said inner tube and said muffle tube is provided at the wall of said inner tube at a part under said separating plate ~~A furnace for drawing an optical fiber as claimed in claim 1,~~ wherein each separating plate has plural protrusions provided on the outer periphery of the separating plate, so as to prevent parts of said separating plate other than said protrusions from contacting said inner wall surface of said inner tube.

Claim 8 (Cancelled)

9. (Currently amended) A furnace for drawing an optical fiber comprising a muffle tube and an inner tube connected to an end of the muffle tube, arranging inside said muffle tube

C² and said inner tube a preform supported by a dummy rod at an upper part thereof, in such a manner that said preform descends with said dummy rod and said preform is melted by a heater arranged outside of said muffle tube, so as to draw an optical fiber from the lower end of said preform, wherein one or more partitions, each partition comprising one or two separating plates, separate a space inside said inner tube above said preform into plural parts in an advancing direction of said preform arranged inside said space, and descending with said preform during drawing an optical fiber, and a gas blowing inlet for blowing an inert gas into said inner tube and said muffle tube is provided at the wall of said inner tube at a part under said separating plate A furnace for drawing an optical fiber as claimed in claim 8, wherein each said separating plate comprises a heat insulating material formed of carbon felt.

Claims 10-12 (Cancelled)